

Claims

This listing of Claims replaces all prior versions and listings of Claims in the application:

1. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus for groups of thermoformed objects constantly held in a correct axial ~~alignment~~alignment, said groups of thermoformed objects being arranged which apparatus includes at least one ~~picking~~pick up ~~up~~ ~~[[--]]~~ and release head (2) having as many receiving seats extending parallel to one another from said head (2) as there are the stacks (4, 4a, 4b) to be handled, and a drive apparatus~~means (7, 19)~~ arranged to move a respective pick up and release head (2) between a stack pick up station (10) and a stack release station (12, 17) of one or more stacks (4) of thermoformed objects and to position it correctly both at the said stack pick up station (10) and at the said stack release station (17, 12), and comprises at least one mobile pusher member (21) arranged to be moved between, and parallel to, the said receiving seats in order to engage ~~at the top thereof the~~ a first end of each of said stacks (4, 4a, 4b) of thermoformed objects (5) located in each receiving seat, and a control drive apparatus~~means (23)~~ for each mobile pusher member (21), thereby following and holding down each stack (4, 4a, 4b) in said correct axial alignment as a second end of each stack is restrained while ~~the same~~ each stack is being released from its respective receiving seat.

2. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said receiving seats are each delimited by at least three hooking rods (~~3~~) having retractable abutting hooks (~~6~~) and is characterized in that the said mobile pusher member (~~21~~) comprises a frame or grid.

3. (Withdrawn) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said receiving seats are each delimited by a pair of guides (40), characterized in that the said mobile pusher member (21) comprises a bar or a grid.

4. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the said controlled drive means comprises at least one linear actuator-(23).

5. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein at the said release or unloading station-(13, 17) comprises at least a mobile abutting or resting member (31) and drive means-(32, 42)-arranged to move the or each mobile resting member-(31) to meet and act as a rest for one or more stacks-(4) or stack lengths-(4a, 4b) seated and being transferred by said pick up-release head-(2) and to move in unison with, but at the opposite side with respect to said pusher member-(21), during stack unloading in order to hold ~~well~~ well-packed the said stacks-(4) or stack lengths-(4a, 4b)-well-packed against the said mobile abutting member-(31), whereas the said pick up-release head-(2) slips off the said stacks-(4) or stack lengths-(4a, 4b).

6. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 5, wherein each mobile abutting or resting member-(31) comprises a frame or grid.

7. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 5, wherein each mobile abutting or resting member-(31) comprises an abutting bar or plate.

8. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 6, wherein the said mobile abutting or resting member ~~(31)~~ and the said pusher member ~~(21)~~ are movable vertically.

9. (Currently amended) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein the said pick up or release station ~~(10, 12, 17)~~ comprises a receiving plate equipped with vertical receiving guides ~~(g)~~.

10. (Withdrawn) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 6, wherein the said mobile abutting or resting member (31) and the said pusher member (21) are movable in a transverse direction.

11. (Withdrawn) A handling apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein the said release or unloading station comprises a tape conveyer (13) equipped with parallel guides (42, 43) which are adjustable in position and arranged to keep packed stacks (4) after the same have been unloaded from the said head (2) and in that at the end of the unloading operation the said pusher member (21) and the said mobile abutting member (31) are designed to be arranged in alignment with a respective guide (42, 43) until all the stacks (4) unloaded onto said conveyer (13) have been transferred in sliding abutting engagement between the said parallel guides (42, 43).

12. (New) A handling apparatus for stacks of thermoformed objects held in a desired axial alignment, said handling apparatus including:

(a) at least one pick up and release head having as many receiving seats extending parallel to one another from said head as there are stacks of thermoformed objects to be

handled, said at least one pick up and release head having associated elongate members for retaining said thermoformed objects as stacks in the desired axial alignment, the elongate members having cooperating elements for supporting distal ends of each of said stacks;

(b) a drive apparatus arranged to move said at least one pick up and release head between a stack pick up station and a stack release station and to position the stacks of thermoformed objects correctly both at the stack pick up station and at the stack release station; and

(c) at least one mobile pusher member located in each receiving seat and arranged to move relative to said receiving seats in order to (i) engage a proximate end of said stacks of thermoformed objects and (ii) urge the thermoformed objects in each stack into a well packed arrangement while said elongate members are withdrawn adjacent said stacks at said release station.

13. (New) The handling apparatus of claim 12 wherein the cooperating elements for supporting distal ends of each of said stacks comprise hooks disposed at distal ends of said elongate members.

14. (New) The handling apparatus of claim 12 wherein the cooperating elements for supporting distal ends of each of said stacks comprise stack supporting surfaces of one or more pusher bars.

15. (New) The handling apparatus of claim 13 wherein the elongate members comprise rods.